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Xavier Koodapuzha

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Editorial

Students of theology and Church History are well aware of the turning point of ecclesiology with the Vatican Council II. In rediscovering the true nature of the Church the Council followed the method of returning to the sources. In this search of the sources it has succeeded to rediscover the rich authentic sources of the Churches of the apostolic tradition.

The fruits of these studies can be classified into three: the sources of the Church in the West, and those of the Greek East and the Syriac Orient. When we deal with the sources of the Syriac Orient the uniqueness of the Church which had its origin and development outside the Roman Empire is of special importance. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Subsequently it began to enjoy the privileges lavishly granted by the Emperors. This privileged position paved the way for adopting the official structures of the Empire. The Churches within the Empire gradually became an integral part of the civil system. The administrative system of the official religion resembled the civil pattern. The various Councils which assembled at the provincial and universal levels were to a great extent patronized by civil authorities. The peace and order of the Church was equally a matter of civil concern.

It is in this context the uniqueness of the Church which existed outside the Roman Empire deserves our special attention. They did not enjoy the protection, privileges and official patronage of the Emperors and the civil authorities. Their administrative system did not develop after the civil pattern. But during the course of the centuries because of the various vicissitudes of history even these Churches did not succeed fully to resist the influences of the system developed in the Roman Empire. But the liturgical traditions have to a great extent succeeded to safeguard the early heritage. The Syro-Malabar Church represents the major section of the Church of the St. Thomas Christians of India. As has been the universal tradition in the Church

the Churches of the neighbouring regions belonged to the same liturgical family. Following the same tradition the Thomas Christians also shared the same liturgy with the neighbouring Church in Persia which also had the St. Thomas heritage. The liturgy is the celebration of the faith of the Church and through the liturgical sources bring home to us the venerable heritage of the Church.

It is with these thoughts we have planned this issue of the Christian Orient on Ecclesiology. The first article by Xavier Koodapuzha presents some of the ecclesiological reflections on the Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana. It is followed by a study of the ecclesiological insights of the Odes of Solomon by J. Kallarangattu. Sr. Sophy Rose CMC analyses some of the texts of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Syro-Malabar Church. I am thankful to the authors for their valuable contributions;

Xavier Koodapuzha
Section Editor

ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SYRO-MALABAR HOLY QURBANA

1. Introduction

The principle 'lex orandi, lex credendi' is a venerable dictum of Catholic theology.¹ In the liturgical celebrations the believers as a community give expression to their common faith heritage which is enshrined in their hearts. Hence it is rightly called a celebration. Every celebration is a public manifestation of the life of a community. In the liturgy the community of believers give expression to their Christian faith by means of officially approved prayers, symbols and ceremonies. As the liturgical life manifests the very life of faith of a Christian community the Church is particularly concerned in safeguarding the liturgical heritage of every Church. Through the Eucharistic celebration the Church understands better her own nature and mission and builds up herself in harmony with the sound Christian heritage. Hence Irenaeus of Lyons teaches: "Our thought is in full accord with the Eucharist, and Eucharist in its turn, confirms our thought".²

The liturgical heritage of the Church is enshrined in the Churches of Eastern and Western traditions. It is an integral

part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the Church of Christ.³ into account the strange vicissitudes which Taking led to the alienation of some of the Eastern Churches from their own liturgical heritage the Vatican II gives the following direction:

"All Eastern rite members should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their established way of life, and that, these should not be altered except by way of an appropriate and organic development. Easterners themselves should honour all these things with the greatest fidelity. Besides they should acquire an ever greater knowledge and a more exact use of them. If they are improperly fallen away from them because of the circumstances of time and personage, let them take pains to return to their ancestral ways".⁴

This teaching of the Council reveals the relevance of the liturgical heritage of the Churches in preserving the faith of the Catholic Church. Liturgy is a part of the sacred tradition of the

1. Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Rome, 1996, No, 32, p. 30.; hereafter=COILC).
2. Against Heresies IV, 18, 5).
3. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1.
4. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6.

Catholic Church. Hence the Constitution on Revelation of Vatican II implicitly invites the special attention of the Catholics to the importance to be given to the sacred tradition:

“Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence”.⁵

The Eastern theology and spirituality are particularly characterized as liturgical. For them the fidelity to the liturgical way of life and patrimony constitute the fidelity to their ecclesial heritage and spirituality. Hence the Vatican II makes the following observation:

“Everybody knows with what love the Eastern Christians enact the sacred liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source of the Church's life and pledge of future glory. In this celebration the faithful united with their bishop and endowed with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, gain access to God the Father through the Son, the Word made flesh who suffered and was glorified. And so made, “partakers of the divine nature” (1 Pet 1:4), they enter into communion with the most holy Trinity”.⁶

The Church is the “community of those who are called” (ekklesia) to bear communitarian witness to Christ. The most sublime expression of this communitarian witness is the liturgical celebration. They pray, open themselves and surrender themselves to the word of God,

mutually exchange the kiss of peace, share the body and blood of Jesus Christ and leave the holy place to bear witness to the Lord in their own lives. The liturgical assemblies manifest the internal faith and its integral harmony in the life of the Church.

“In this way the entire body of the faithful of the liturgical assembly, well co-ordinated and connected through the collaboration of every joint, according to the particular power of each member, can grow and attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of Christ, avoiding the risk of being carried here and there by every wind of doctrine (cf. Eph. 4:13-16)”.⁷

II. Ecclesiological set - of the Churches

Because of this unique importance of the liturgical celebration in the ecclesial life of every Christian the whole set up of the churches where the celebrations take place should necessarily be conducive to the spirit of the liturgy. Hence the very architecture of the Church is geared to the nature and structure of the liturgical celebration. Every celebration demands a proper set up. Hence every individual Church which has got its own liturgical tradition is very earnest, precise and cautious in prescribing the details of the necessary structure for the liturgical celebration. Yves Congar explains this essential aspect:

“One could almost establish an equivalence between church, tradition and liturgy. The liturgy is utterly penetrated by the tradition, handing

5. Dei Verbum, 9.

6. Unitatis Redintegratio, 15.

7. COILC, No. 34, p. 31

it on in a vivid way and making it live. A number of Greek accounts of the church are commentaries of the liturgy explanations of the church building. The liturgy is the communication of the mystery of the Trinity, it is 'heaven on earth'. At the same time it communicates the reality of the church. The priest celebrating behind the iconostasis signifies the hidden mystery of God. The deacon establishes, as did Christ, communication between the priest and the faithful. Those in whom the Spirit distributes the variety of his gifts, bring about the mystery. St. John Chrysostom speaks in this connection of the priestly pleroma of the bishop".⁸

The community which takes part in their liturgical celebration is part and parcel of the liturgical reality and the church building itself becomes a manifestation and symbolic expression of their faith. The mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation, public ministry, death and resurrection of Christ etc. become the central themes of the liturgical celebration. The ceremonies of the celebration symbolically bring home to the mind of the participants the above-mentioned scenes. The recent Roman document giving detailed directives on liturgical celebration is quite relevant in this context.

"The sacred building in the time of the Church is a sign which shows us the way toward Him who is the Lord of the heavenly and earthly creation, the Lord of the Seraphim,

King of Israel, the Holy One, who came to live among us in order to lead us to his Kingdom, because "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The physical church is a sign of the heavenly altar of sanctuary where Christ has penetrated, not one made by the hands of man, which is a copy of the true one, "but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf" (Heb. 9:24). The sanctuary thus transfers us to a different world, to the presence of God. This relation between the two worlds, the heavenly and the terrestrial, is affirmed often in all the Christian liturgies."⁹

This liturgical vision of the Church is very well expressed in the architecture of the Thomas Christians. As a pilgrim community on their march to meet the Lord of creation at His solemn second coming they used to assemble in the church facing the East. The East is the source of light of a Christian for whom Jesus Christ is the true Light of the world (Jn. 1:9, 8:12; 9:5). The pilgrims gathered together as a worshipping community are moving forward to their destination, the sanctuary which is the glorious throne and the seat with thousands of cherubim who sing "alleluia and tens of thousands of seraphim and archangels who sing, kneel, and worship, give thanks and glorify at all times."^{9a} They begin their liturgical celebration in this heavenly context and start the divine praise of the angels "Glory to God in the highest...and on earth, peace and firm hope to men in all times for ever

8. Diversity and Communion, (SCM Press Ltd, London), 1984, p. 72.

9. COILC, No. 102, p. 82.

9 a). TSMQ, Anthem of the sanctuary

and ever". According to the particular liturgical tradition of the Thomas Christians the community joins the heavenly choir of the angels and sing with them the prayer which the Lord has taught them:

"Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name; your kingdom come holy, holy, holy, are you. Our Father in heaven, the heaven and earth are full of the grandeur of your glory, Angels and men cry out to you: holy, holy, holy, are you".¹⁰

The sanctuary veil separates the sanctuary from the haykla and questroma. In the place of the veil the churches of the Byzantine tradition has got a wooden separation called iconostasis decorated with paintings. The faithful who faces the sanctuary sees the holy place separated by a veil. This separation of the sanctuary signifies that the naked human eyes cannot see the heavenly Jerusalem. Only the eyes of faith can see beyond. Inside the sanctuary the earthly and the heavenly realities are symbolically expressed. The baptismal font on the southern side of the sanctuary reminds a believer of the spiritual birth of every Christian in the heavenly kingdom. The altar at the centre of the sanctuary signifies the self effacing sacrificial life of a disciple of Christ. The holy Eucharist (tabernacle) and the relics of the martyrs and saints (beth sahde) on the left remind the worshipper of his eschatological communion with Jesus Christ and the saints.

The bema, a raised platform which is prescribed at the centre of the haykla

(the place where the community assemble), is the place where the liturgy including the Scriptural reading prior the anaphora is celebrated. This reminds the faithful of the public ministry of Jesus Christ among his people.

"In the Eastern tradition, the ambo has different forms with relatively homogeneous signification...From the ambo, the Gospel is proclaimed, the homily could be given The equivalent in the Syrian Churches is Bema, a platform erected in the centre of the Church, with chairs of the Bishop and the presbyters, a small altar with the Cross, the Gospel book and candles, referred to as "Golgotha". From the Bema, the deacon proclaims the Gospel, and the homily is given... Therefore, it is important that in restoring old churches or constructing new ones, those responsible should attentively study the symbology expressed in them..."¹¹

The prayer on the occasion of the solemn procession of the celebrant carrying the gospel to the bema refers to the sending of the Son who is the splendour of the glory of the father.

"O Christ, splendour of the glory of your Father and image of the son (gnoma) of Him who begot you; you did manifest yourself in a human body like ours and did illumine the darkness of our mind by the light of the gospel. We praise, worship, and glorify you at all times, Lord of all, for ever, Amen".

10. Text of the Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana = TSMQ.

11. COILC No. 105, p. 85.

“O Christ, light of the world and life of all; glory be to the Eternal Mercy which sent you to us, for ever. Amen”.¹²

The sanctuary was on the eastern side and the altar occupies the central position. The choir which helps the community to sing the song of praise occupies the platform below the sanctuary and one step above the haykla. The sleeva occupies the central place of the sanctuary above the altar.

III. Turning to the East

It has been the tradition of the Eastern Churches to have the sanctuary in the East and turn in the same direction during the prayer and liturgical celebrations. I am reminded of an incident which took place when I went to pay a visit to a patient who is a friend of mine. Another member of the staff of the Seminary was with me. The patient belonged to the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. After the conversation he requested us to pray. Both of us stood up to begin the prayer. Immediately he pointed out to us the East so that we may not turn to the wrong direction during the prayer. The Eastern tradition which remains deep buried among the Thomas Christians has not yet disappeared despite the alienation of the clergy. Another incident also is thought provoking. I was invited to a Malankara Catholic family in connection with a wedding. There were other priests too. When it was time to start the prayer before leaving for the parish Church the father of the girl requested us to begin the prayer. All of us including about ten priests got up for prayer. As we were in the reception room we were facing

almost each other. The father of the girl did not like to have any irregularity during such an auspicious occasion, bluntly told us that we should turn to the East. The layman had to remind the clergy of the time-honoured tradition which existed among the St. Thomas Christians!

This tradition which remains buried deep in the hearts of the faithful is being to a great ignored by the clergy and religious who have been trained in the seminaries or religious institutes where Eastern traditions are either unknown or ignored. But the ignorance of a meaningful tradition by the clerical leadership does not legitimize it. On the contrary, it becomes all the more imperative on their part to learn these traditions and not to get alienated from the community which has not entirely lost them.

The instruction of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches on liturgy dated January 6, 1996, gives the following common directive to the Oriental Churches:

“Ever since ancient times, it has been customary in the prayer of the Eastern Churches to prostrate oneself to the ground, turning toward the east; the buildings themselves were constructed such that the altar would face the east. Saint John of Damascus explains the meaning of this tradition: “It is not for simplicity nor by chance that we pray turned toward the regions of the East (...). Since God is intelligible light (1 Jn. 1:5), and in the Scripture, Christ is called the Sun of justice (Mal. 3:20) and the East (Zec. 3:8 of LXX), it is necessary to

dedicate the east to him in order to render him worship. The Scripture says: 'Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed' (Gen. 2:8). In search of the ancient homeland and tending toward it we worship God. Even the tent of Moses had its curtain veil and propitiatory facing the east. And the tribe of Judah, in as much as it was the most notable, encamped on the east side (cf. Ez, 44:1). Finally, the Lord placed on the cross looked toward the west, and so we prostrate ourselves in his direction, facing him. When he ascended to heaven, he was raised toward the east, and thus his disciples adored him, and thus he will return, in the same way as they saw him go to heaven (cf. Acts. 1:11), as the Lord himself said: 'For just as lighting comes from the east and is seen as far of the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be' (Mt. 24:27). Waiting for him, we prostrate ourselves toward the east. It is an unwritten tradition, deriving from the Apostles."

This rich and fascinating interpretation also explains the reason for which the celebrant who presides in the liturgical celebration was facing the east, just as the people who participate. It is not a question, as is often claimed, of presiding the celebration with the back turned to the people, but rather of guiding the people in pilgrimage toward the Kingdom, invoked in prayer until the return of the Lord.

Such practice, threatened in numerous Eastern Catholic Churches by a new and recent Latin influence, is thus of profound value and should be safeguarded as truly coherent with the Eastern liturgical spirituality.¹³

The position of the celebrant turning to the sanctuary together with the community expresses the reality that he also belongs to the same liturgical community and offers prayers and sacrifices to God together with them. The sense of sacred which is characteristic of eastern heritage and the practice of not turning the back to the sanctuary is a common religious tradition of India which is shared by the Christian and non Christian religions in India.

IV. Brotherhood of the Celebrant with the people of God

The prayers of the Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana explicitly expresses the intimate communion and unity of the celebrant with the community. Though by virtue of the priestly ordination some are authorized by the Church to be the official ministers the intimate link of brotherhood exists among those who are reborn in Christ.

"The baptized, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. Thus through all those works befitting Christian men they can offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light" (Car. 1 Pet. 2:4-10)¹⁴

13. COILC, No. 107, pp. 86-87.

14. Lumen Gentium 10a.

At the time of the solemn entrance into the sanctuary the celebrant slowly moves forward making three profound bows. This physical distance from the community does not imply any kind of separation of the celebrant from the liturgical community. Immediately after entering the sanctuary he turns to the community and requests their prayers for carrying on the celebration.

“Bless me O Lord, My brethren, pray for me that this Qurbana may be completed through my hands”.

R. May God, the Lord of all, strengthen you to fulfil His will and accept your Qurbana and be pleased with the sacrifice you offer for us, for you, and for the whole world, through the goodness of his mercy for ever.¹⁵

This same request for the prayer of the community is repeated immediately before the third and fourth g'hanta prayers. The community makes the following response:

“May Christ hear your prayers and receive your Qurbana. May He make splendid your priesthood in the kingdom of heaven, and be pleased in this sacrifice which you offer on your behalf, on our behalf and on behalf of the whole world that hopefully awaits His grace and mercy for ever. Amen.”¹⁶

The sacramental ordination to priesthood or episcopacy does not isolate the ministers from the basic brotherhood.

The ministers are “bothers among brothers” (Car. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 3). The Christian brotherhood does not allow any kind of superiority or inferiority in the community. The community of the People of God who are brothers and sisters assemble in their common home to offer prayers and sacrifices to their common Father in heaven. The one who enters the holy place cannot and should not presume any kind of superiority over the children of God for whose service he is officially appointed. The stewards of the mysteries of God (I Cor. 4: 1-2) are not lords. They are appointed to serve the Children of God according to the will of the Divine Master. The abiding presence of the Lord among His people does not leave any room for the stewards to entertain any false presumption to play the role of the only Lord of the Church who is Jesus Christ.

V. Prayer for the harmony of the world and the Churches

In the karoza prayer following the Gospel reading we have the prayer for the peace, unity and harmony of the world and the Churches.

“For the peace, harmony and stability of the whole world and of all the churches we beseech you.

Have mercy on us, O Lord’.”¹⁷

Peace and Harmony of the World

The peace and harmony of the world and of the churches are the goals of the mission of the Church. God created the humanity after His image and

15. TSMC : Request of the Celebrant.

16. TSMQ:Reply of the community.

17. TSMQ : The karoza after the Gospel).

likeness (Gen. 1:26). Peace and harmony reigned supreme in the universe in which human beings were created. The planets, Land, sea, trees, animals, birds and fishes existed in harmony. But human, selfishness disrupted this peace and harmony. The Divine Redeemer was promised and in the fullness of time God became man to restore peace and harmony and salvation.

"In Him (the Beloved Son) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And He is the Eikon of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth... all things have been created by Him and for Him. And he is before all things and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the Body, the Church" (Col. 1: 14-18).

Human sin corrupted and destroyed the harmony of the whole creation. Hence the redemption cannot be narrowed down to personal human relations with God. The redemption has a cosmic dimension. Every thing was created in Christ and the universe was put at the disposal of the humanity. Jesus Christ continues to be the Lord of the creation. The whole cosmos has to be redeemed and restored in Christ. The Church has received the divine mission to transform the universe. This cosmic mission is a stewardship entrusted by the Son of God. The Church is at the service of creation so that the reign of God may again prevail in it. The eternal harmony which exists in the Trinity should reflect also in the creation through the mission of the Church.

Koinonia of the Churches

The Church of Christ is catholic. Its koinonia extends to all the churches which are spread all over the world. God's reign should be realized in them. Through them the evangelical transformation of the world should take place. It has been the unanimous tradition of the Church that the Catholic Church is the communion of Churches. These churches have the same faith and morals, the same sacraments and same hierarchical communion (LG 23, OE 2). But they are different in liturgical celebrations, theological outlook, spirituality, and disciplinary system. Though they are different they remain deeply united.

In the world there are different countries, nations, races, civilizations, cultures, languages etc. These constitute the rich diversity of the world. These differences do not and should not constitute conflicts among them. Unity in diversity is the beauty of the world. It is not a monotonous uniform reality. The Church of Christ as the permeating spiritual force evangelizes this reality. The purpose of evangelical permeation is never to destroy the rich diversity of this reality but to enrich and elevate them by the eternal values which the Son of God wanted to reestablish in the world. The purpose of incarnation was to restore and redeem this world in its totality and to build up unity and harmony among his creatures and in the whole world. This unity should draw its inspiration and strength from the eternal harmony.

The liturgical celebration of the Syro-Malabar Church reflects this reality and wants its faithful to pray and work

for the communion and reconciliation of the whole world in Jesus Christ. The goal of evangelization is this harmony which is the dawn of the "new earth and new heaven". This liturgical prayer is the most legitimate and authentic expression of a Church which realizes its role in the world.

VI. Missionary Dimension

In the fourth g'hanta prayer there is a special emphasis on the missionary dimension of the Church.

"And grant us your tranquillity and peace all the days of the world that all the inhabitants of the earth may know you, that it is you who are the only true God, the Father, and that you have sent our Lord Jesus Christ your Son and your beloved...."¹⁸

The Church is to proclaim the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus Christ. The reign of God is the content of the proclamation. The true peace and tranquillity in the society can be achieved only when the will of God becomes the rule of the life of the world and society. The Church exists to proclaim this reign to the nations. The Vatican II states that the Church is essentially missionary (Ad Gentes, 2). The disciples of Christ have to proclaim what they have experienced in their own lives. Evangelization is indeed an integration into the divine fellowship which is beautifully expressed by the apostle St. John.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have

seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us: and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete."¹⁹ (1 Jn. 1:1–5).

VII. The Pneumatic Emphasis

The life of the Church is the life in the Spirit. In the celebration of the sacraments and preeminently that of the Holy Qurbana the Holy Spirit is the sanctifying principle. Hence the Spirit of God is invoked to sanctify the Holy sacrifice and the assembly. The prayer of Epiclesis is as follows:

O My God, may your Holy Spirit come down....

and dwell in this Qurbana of your servants and bless it and sanctify it that it may be to us, O My Lord, unto the pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven with all those who have found favour in your presence"¹⁹.

The Christian life is essentially a life of communion. It begins from God and returns to the same source of life.

18. TSMQ: Fourth g'hanta prayer).

19. TSMQ: Epiclesis Prayer).

Jesus Christ has revealed that God is the eternal source of communion. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are united in the eternal communion (Jn. 17: 21). It is an eternal harmony in which each person indwells in the other. There is no alienation and the Trinitarian communion is the most sublime expression of interpersonal intimacy. Hence during the celebration of the Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana the Pauline salutation is twice announced by the celebrant. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always and for ever and ever. Amen".

Sin separates a person from his neighbour and alienation takes place between them. Alienation destroys the harmony which God wanted to prevail among His children. They are being created after the divine image (Gen. 1:26). and alienation is a rebellion against the very nature which the human beings have inherited from God. God has infused the spirit of love and harmony into the human heart and wanted every person to keep it alive in his relations with the others. An alienated person is in distress and disquiet because he is in a state in which he is different from what he has to be.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man to redeem the alienated children of God. The human selfishness was destroyed by his selflessness. The self-effacing love manifested in his life and the self-sacrifice made on the cross reveal the divine will for the humanity.

The celebration of the Holy Qurbana is the living commemoration of that event. It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which continues to sanctify the Church. The celebration of the Eucharist is the most sublime expression of the life of the Christian community which is being gathered to share in the divine mysteries.

The celebrant of the Holy Qurbana commemorates the role of the Holy Spirit in the conferment of the Holy Orders.

In the prayer of imposition the celebrant says:

"....And through the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is of consubstantial with your glorious divinity, are conferred, by the imposition of hands, the orders of true priesthood....to administer spiritual helps to the faithful. Do therefore, O Lord, perfect your grace in us, and pour forth your gifts through our hands, and may your mercy and the loving kindness of your divinity be upon us and on this people whom you have chosen for yourself".²⁰

The Spirit of God continues to abide in the Church and through the imposition of hands the leadership is constituted. The role of the leadership is to be at the disposal of the Spirit who continues to pour out his gifts to the People of God. The people belong to God and the ministers are only stewards of the mysteries. Hence they are neither Lords nor masters but those appointed to act according to the will of the divine Master.

20. TSMQ: Rite of Dismissal and prayer of Imposition.

In the Holy Qurbana, after the dismissal of the catechumens there is a solemn ceremony of prostration. The celebrant accompanied by the archdeacon and the deacons makes prostrations at the centre and the four sides of the bema. The sanctifying role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic sacrifice is sung jointly by the celebrant deacons and the choir. It is a public profession of the unworthiness of the celebrant to approach the holy altar and acknowledgement of the power of the Holy Spirit which will sanctify the body and blood of Christ.

“Celebrant: Your priests shall vest themselves with holiness and your holy ones with glory”

“Choir: The priest, when he comes to the holy altar, devoutly stretches his hands to heaven and invokes the Holy Spirit; and the Spirit descends from above and sanctifies the Body”²¹

Deacons: “Let us go into His tent and adore His foot-stool”.

After the solemn prostrations the Celebrant makes the solemn entrance into the sanctuary bowing three times and reciting a prayer which acknowledges his unworthiness. Immediately after entering the sanctuary he turns to the people and requests their prayers for the divine assistance to

complete the eucharistic celebration. This profound sense of solidarity of the celebrant with the community manifests the ecclesiological reality of the Church which is the Mystical Body of Christ. It is full harmony with the teaching of Vatican II which qualifies the community as a priestly community.²²

Conclusion

The Church is a worshipping community. The liturgical worship manifests the nature and mission of the Church. The set up of the churches, the prayers, ceremonies and symbols lead us to the reality which they signify. The Syro-Malabar holy Qurbana begins and concludes with the prayer “Our Father” taught by Jesus Christ. This prayer presumes the presence of a community of believers who profess the human fraternity and divine paternity of God. It is a reconciled assembly which alone is worthy to approach the altar of God for offering sacrifice (Mt 5:23-24). The Church is the community of those who are called (Ecclesia) to be authentic witnesses of the true faith which Jesus has taught us. The harmony of the world and the communion of the churches are interrelated. The creation and redemption are interlocked. The worshipping community manifests the koinonia at its deepest level. The Church exists to bear witness to the eternal koinonia in the world.

Fr. Xavier Koodapuzha

21. TSMQ: (Song of prostration).

22. (Cfr. LG-IIa; LG 10; 34b).

ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE EAST-SYRIAC LITURGY OF THE HOURS

In the contemporary era, ecclesiology is taken for granted as an area of theological research. But the ecclesiology as such did not become a matter of systematic investigation before the middle ages.¹ The NT writers viewed the Church as object of faith and of loving concern. The same is true of the Fathers. Although the Fathers were passionately committed to the Church, they did not write about it in an organized way.² They placed the Church everywhere in their faith and in their life. They had the consciousness of the Church, a loving and precise consciousness but not reflex consciousness.³ The Church for them was not the "object" but always the "subject" of theology.⁴ According to Y. Congar, what was important for the Fathers was not an explanation of their faith in the Church but the celebration of Church's faith in God who intervened in their history. This they professed communally, ie, in the liturgical celebration.⁵ That means, liturgy was their source of faith as well as the source and place for theologization. Here comes

the unique importance and relevance of one of the Christian traditions - Syriac Orient - which makes use of the liturgy as its *locus theologicus*. Today we stand on the threshold not only of a new century but of a new millennium. It is particularly fitting therefore to have a look at this cradle tradition of Christianity in order to grasp the Church and its tradition in its pristine form. Nevertheless, in this article we try only to elucidate the Syriac understanding of the nature of the Church based on the ancient theological principle *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*. We make use of the Liturgical prayers, especially of the Liturgy of the Hours as the primary source⁶ to bring out a Liturgical Ecclesiology. Since our study is based on the liturgical prayers, which is arranged in accordance with the spirit of the liturgical year, a brief understanding of the East-Syriac Liturgical Year is our primary concern. Then, we will give certain salient aspects of the theology of the Church implied in the prayers and finally we draw certain conclusions in a prognostic perspective.

- 1 P. L. Huillier, "Ecclesiology in the Canons of the First Nicene Council" *SVTQ* 27 (1983) 119.
- 2 P. Granfield, "The Mystery of the Church" *AER* 160 (1969) 1.
- 3 L. Bouyer, *Church of God* (Chicago: 1982) 5.
- 4 A. Schmemmann, *Church World Mission* (New York: 1979) 21.
- 5 Y. Congar, "The Conciliar Structure of Regime of the Church" *Concilium* 167 (1983) 4-5.
- 6 P. Bedjan (ed), *Breviarium iuxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum* 3 Vols (Paris: 1886 - 1887) Reprint (Rome: 1938). «Hereafter BBRSO».

1. Medabbranutha: the Core of Liturgical Year

Liturgy is the representation and actualization of the whole mystery of God's economy of salvation (*medabbranutha*) accomplished by the Father in Jesus Christ with the work of the Holy Spirit in time in view of man's salvation. In every eucharistic celebration, the whole mystery is wholly and fully re-enacted and the salvation is offered gratuitously. Every community when it takes part in this most sublime and divine action has to realize its own salvation through this salvific acts of Christ. But as C. Vagaggini writes, "our psychological capacity is limited, we cannot grasp all at one time the riches of grace of the mystery of Christ. Hence we must have this mystery taken apart, as it were analysed successively in its various aspects that we may concentrate on one at a time and thus succeed gradually in becoming permeated more and more with the full meaning of every Mass."⁷ It is for this gradual realization, the Church uses the pedagogical method of unfolding the mystery of divine dispensation part by part over the period of an year according to a wisely systematized cycle.⁸

The *medabbranutha* celebrated during the liturgical year of the East - Syrians is divided mainly into two: the mystery of Christ from Annunciation - Nativity to Resurrection - Ascension and the mystery of the Church from the Pentecost to the Dedication of the Church. In *medabbranutha*, though the paschal mystery of Christ is the subject of celebration, the Trinity is the centre of worship as it is the object of the apostolic preaching.⁹ Since the economy of the salvation that is accomplished through the paschal event of Christ is the entire act of the triune God.

2. The Plan of East Syriac Liturgical Year

The organization of the cycle of the liturgical year seems to have begun in Jerusalem in the time of St. Cyril (†386); but it developed differently in various Churches, no where more fixed than among the East Syrians (Chaldeans).¹⁰ According to tradition, the present East Syrian liturgical calendar was compiled by the great liturgical reformer Iso-Yahb the great (850-658).¹¹ He has arranged the cycle of worship in a very systematic way by celebrating the whole salvific works of Christ in the span of an year.

7. C. Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy* (Minnesota: 1959) 95-96.

8. V. Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Year of the Syro Malabar Rite" *Eph. Lit.* 90 (1976) 173.

9. P. Yousif, "Liturgical Spirituality" in A. Thottakara (ed). *East - Syrian Spirituality* (Bangalore: 1990) 25-26.

10. S. Pudichery, *Ramsa: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Chaldean Vespers* (Bangalore 1972) 62.

11. For a detailed understanding of Iso-Yahb, Cfr E. A. W. Budge (ed), *The Book of the Governors, the Historica Monastica of Thomas, Bishop of Marga AD 840* (London: 1893) chap. XI.

For that he divided the liturgical year into nine periods or seasons of ideally seven weeks each. The cycle begins with the period of Annunciation together with

Nativity and ends with the period of the Dedication of the Church, the eschatological fulfilment of the history of salvation. The seasons are:

<i>Subbara - Yalda</i>	Annunciation - Nativity	: the mystery of incarnation of our Lord.
<i>Denha</i>	Epiphany	: the mystery of the baptism of our Lord and the revelation of Trinity
<i>Sawma Rabba</i>	Great Fast	: the mystery of passion and death of Christ
<i>Qiyamta</i>	Resurrection	: the mystery of resurrection and ascension.
<i>Shlihe</i>	Apostles	: the mystery of Pentecost and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church
<i>Qaita</i>	Summer	: the mystery of the expansion of the Church
<i>Eliya u Sliva</i>	Elias - Cross	: the mystery of the victory of the Cross
<i>Mushe</i>	Moses	: the mystery of Christ's second coming
<i>Qudash 'Edta</i>	Dedication of the Church	: the mystery of our final glorification of the Church with Christ. ¹²

These are the nine liturgical seasons of the liturgical year of the East Syrian tradition. By systematically presenting all the phases of salvation history from Annunciation - which recalls the OT phase of the economy of God - up to the final consolidation of the Church to its Bridegroom in the eschatological Kingdom, this liturgical year drive man into the Mystery of Divine Dispensation (*Raza de medabbranutha*).

3. The Theology of the Church Found in the Liturgical Year

We have already said that the *medabbranutha* is the core of the liturgical

year. According to the Pauline understanding, the *medabbranutha* is the accomplishment of God's eternal plan of salvation hidden from all eternity that he calls *raza'*-mystery. The ultimate aim of this *medabbranutha* is communion-*shawtaputha*-, that is perfect union of everything in Christ. The theology of the East - Syriac tradition is thus centred on these three theological concepts *raza'*, *medabbranutha* and *shawtaputha*. Consequently, the Church which is the part and parcel of the *medabbranutha* is also a *raza'* and *shawtaputha*. The Church is mystery and communion (*raza'* and *shawtaputha*) since God is mystery and the communion (*raza'* and *shawtaputha*) and it

12. P. Yousif, "Liturgical Spirituality", 25 - 27; J. Chittilappally, *Medabbranutha* <UDD> (Rome: 1989) 44.

is through the *medabbranutha* the 'raza' is revealed and the *shawtaputha* is achieved.¹³ The Church has therefore an intrinsic and interlocking relation with the Trinity.¹⁴ It is from the trinitarian mystery that the Church originates and to which it moves. Pertain to the trinitarian origin of the Church the liturgical prayer says:

Church a haven of peace whose foundations the Father has laid and whom the Son has completed and built and whom the Spirit came down and sanctified.¹⁵

However, as a reality revealed in space and time the Church has three distinct but comprehensive phases of existence parallel to the three phases of the salvation history attributed to the divine persons. They can be named as:

- the Church of God (the Father)
ie, the pre-existent Church of the OT
- the Church of Christ (the Son)
ie, the historically established
Church upon the apostles.
- the Church of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit)
ie, the Church that is moving
towards the eschata.

Among the Syriac Fathers it is Ephrem who presents beautifully the three phases of one and the same Church using a typology. While speaking of the Passover in

his *Hymn on Unleavened Bread*, he wrote as follows:

The type was in Egypt, the reality
in the Church
the sealing of the reward will be
in the Kingdom.

Although this stanza is not a direct treatment on the Church, it sums up Ephrem's view of the Church's position in history as intermediate between the former types and the eschatological fulfillment. The symbolic force of the typology is progressive: the time of the Church is the fulfillment or reality in relation to the OT types, but the Church itself is only the type of the eschatological kingdom.¹⁶ Ephrem's understanding can be therefore summarized in three stages:- types, Church and Kingdom. The Church is therefore in an interim period; itself symbolic to Kingdom.¹⁶ The above said reality can be further elucidated by the liturgical prayer:

Father designed her on Mt. Sinai and spoke of it as the type of the Church.¹⁶
O Christ...you established the Church on earth on the type of the heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁷

Thus in the prayers we see a progress in understanding: from shadow (OT 'ekklesia) to reality (NT 'ekklesia) and from reality to the fulfillment in *eschata* (the heavenly Jerusalem). The imageries found in the prayers express this theological thrust either completely or partially.

13 BBRSO III, 396.

14 Cfr. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, (Cambridge: 1975) 53 - 54, 243-244.

15 R. Murray, *Symbols*.....243 - 244.

16 BBRSO III, 424.

17 BBRSO III, 399.

4. Imageries of the Church: Expressions of Raza' and Shawtaputha

Since the Church is a mystery and communion, we cannot speak of it in definite and clear cut terms. Just as Jesus described the mystery of the Kingdom of God in terms of parables and imageries, the Syriac tradition presents the mystery of the Church through various imageries. The following are some of the important imageries and ecclesial concepts found in the liturgical prayers: Church as Bride, Mother, Daughter, Ship, Haven, Flock of God, God's plantation, Church built on the Rock of faith, Church as a building, a Redeemed Community, a spring of sanctification and the type of heavenly Jerusalem. However, the liturgical prayers speak so succinctly the basic *notae* of the Church One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Moreover, it elucidates elaborately the trinitarian doctrine revealed through the *medabbranutha* and that is the basis of our understanding of the Church. Although all these themes are rich in their content and describe various aspects of the mystery of the Church, we concentrate here only on the theme Church as Bride. Nevertheless, we will try to incorporate certain salient ideas from other imageries or concepts whenever and wherever it is found appropriate.

5. Church as Bride

The concept of Church as the bride is one of the prominent and lovely images in the East - Syrian tradition especially in their liturgical prayers. It is a thoroughly biblical imagery having OT antecedent¹⁸ NT reality¹⁹ and the eschatological fulfillment.²⁰ The actualization of the Church as bride is presented through nuptial language such as betrothal, dowry, adorning, crowning, wedding feast, bride chamber etc. In reality it is through Jesus' baptism at Jordan and His death on the cross that Church has been made His beloved bride, Nevertheless, the Church is presented in the liturgical prayers as the bride of the Father as well as the bride of Christ.

a. Church Bride of the Father

In the liturgical texts the Father is called the spouse of the Church:

Blessed are you O Church, crowned bride of the Father, the King of kings.²¹

As a pre-requisite to take her as His bride, He betrothed her at Mt. Sinai through Moses.²²

God who is from eternity, on account of His love betrothed you as bride to Himself.²³

18. Cfr. Book of Hosea, Ez. 16, 23; Is. 54:1-5 etc.

19. Cfr. Eph. 5:21 - 28.

20. Rev. 19 & 21.

21. BBRSO III, 409.

22. BBRSO III, 432.

23. BBRSO III, 394.

A chaste wedding feast took place
in the wilderness,
with the bridal chamber set on
Mt. Sinai

The Holy one descended and took in
betrothal the daughter of Abraham
His beloved friend.²⁴

However, He sanctified her and made her
beautiful.

O Church, the adorned spouse, engaged
one of the King and the daughter
of the King, glorify and thank the
heavenly spouse who sanctified you....²⁵

Blessed are you O Faithful Church,
the bride of the Father, the King of
kings, according to the predictions
of the prophets, your beauty was
made perfect with gold.²⁶

The Church is here presented as daughter
as well as bride simultaneously. Is it
a mistake in understanding? As far as the
biblical tradition is concerned it is not
at all a mistake rather a revelation. Since
this beautiful imagery is taken from
the prophets, notably by Ezekiel²⁷ and
Isaiah. In Isaiah we read: "thy Maker
is thy Husband" (Is. 54:5). It also sheds
light to the theo-centric characte of the
Church as well as its pre-existence. Both

are important themes found in the litur-
gical prayers.

b. Church: Bride of Christ

The liturgical prayer speaks abund-
antly on this theme. Christ accepted her
as his bride at Jordan²⁸ through John the
Baptist²⁹ and later through the apostles.³⁰

i. Church Bride at Jordan

The baptism of Jesus at Jordan is
a decisive event in the making of Church
as Bride. It is at Jordan He betrothed
her through John the Baptist. However,
as a prerequisite to receive her as His
own He purified and sanctified her in
His grace³¹ through the baptismal water.
Although the purificatory activity is pre-
sented as of Christ's, in certain occasions
it is attributed to the Holy Spirit³² as
well as to the Holy Trinity.³³ The ulti-
mate purpose of the purification and
sanctification - redemption - of the Church
is to make the Church a source of san-
ctification to the world.

The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit,
the adorable and holy Nature who
willed to make you the spring of
sanctification and a place of refuge
for all.³⁴

24 Ephrem, *Hymn on Resurrection* 3:2. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Bangalore 1988) 93-94.

25 BBRSO III, 410.

26 BBRSO III, 423.

27. Ez. 16:18-14.

28. BBRSO III, 397; 1, 407.

29. „ I, 403.

30. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* XIV.

31. BBRSQ III, 410.

32. „ 411.

33. „ 393.

34. „ 393, 438.

Christ, through His baptism has not only purified her but also clothed her with the garments of glory.⁸⁵ The garment with which the bride is adorned is spiritual and imperishable⁸⁶ and it is woven by her bridegroom himself.⁸⁷ It is a garment of light or light itself and this light is her bridegroom Christ himself.⁸⁸ The clothing will be completed when the bridegroom comes in his great glory.⁸⁹ The garments of the bride will show her likeness to Christ. Every believer who receives baptism puts on this garment of glory which is the fruit of Christ's redemptive activity.

ii. Church Bride at the Cross

We have seen that Christ betrothed her at Jordan, at His baptism. But this is not the full picture of the imagery. For the Syriac Fathers, the Church is the bride of Christ not only in the Jordan but also on the cross.⁴⁰ She is wedded

to him on the cross and in his life-giving blood has written the marriage document.⁴¹ However, the precious blood of Christ which made to flow from his side⁴² at the piercing of lance,⁴³ is the dowry He paid to the bride.⁴⁴ The dowry Christ gave to his bride out of his love⁴⁵ is something unique. Because "no man has ever given his body and blood to his bride..."⁴⁶ as the dowry. The dowry he gave to her is not perishable as gold or silver but imperishable and incorruptible.⁴⁷ With this dowry he purchased her,⁴⁸ pardoned her and nourished her and all her children.⁴⁹ Such a valuable price he earned through the sacrifice of his person (self-sacrifice).⁵⁰ It is this sacrifice that the priests, indeed with angels celebrate and consider this as the pledge of their life.⁵¹

Thus through the sacrifice on the cross the Church was redeemed and betrothed to Christ, her celestial bride-

35. *BBRSO* III, 410.

36. „ 410.

37. „ 410.

38. „ 409.

39. „ 420.

40. „ 406.

41. „ 410-11.

42. „ 430.

43. Jn. 19:34.; *BBRSO* III, 431. For a detailed theological understanding of the meaning of soldier's lance in relation to the flaming sword of the Cherubim in Gen. 3:24, CfR. R. Murray, "The Lance which Re-opened Paradise a Mysterious Reading in the Early Syriac Fathers" *OCP* 39 (1973), 224-234.

44. *BBRSO* III, 403.

45. „ 436.

46. „ 397.

47. „ 398.

48. „ 405.

49. „ 403.

50. „ 403.

51. „ 436

groom.⁵² By suffering and death he liberated her from the yoke of errors⁵³ and from the slavery of demons.⁵⁴ He invited the Church to his bridechamber, made her as the spring of healing⁵⁵ promised her life and ineffable blessing and made her sit at the right of the Father together with him.⁵⁶ All these are done gratuitously by Christ for his bride out of his love for her.⁵⁷

From the above said liturgical prayers, it is evident that, as R. Murray says, "Christ's espousals at his baptism, the anticipatory symbol of his death, were fulfilled on calvary, when the Church was born from his side, the second Eve from the second Adam. "There came forth blood and water", which is his Church, and it is built on him; like Adam for his wife was taken from his side. The rib of Adam was his wife and the blood of our Lord, his Church",⁵⁸ The blood and the water, however, prefigure the Church and the sacraments baptism and Eucharist. These are the two sacraments that constitute the Church.

The events of Christ's baptism in the Jordan and his death on the cross

were not meant to be distinct moments in time, but manifest a power that will extend through time. The waters blessed by the baptism of Christ and the blood and water which poured from the side of Christ are gifts to His bride and her children through out the history.

iii. Betrothal Through the Apostles

In the liturgical prayers there is a mentioning of another betrother, more correctly betrothers and they are the apostles.

Rise and lifted up [from the dust virgin betrothed through the apostles.⁶⁰

It is Aphrahat who developed this idea that the apostles are the betrothers. But this idea is not of his own. It is close to the NT use of imagery found in 2 Cor. 11:2. What is note worthy here is that Christ has taken the place of God at Sinai and the apostle has assumed the role of Moses.⁶¹

iv Typological Meaning

When we take the betrothal at Mt. Sinai, we can say that was a 'type' of the betrothal that is going to happen. In the liturgical prayer we read:

52. *BBRSO III*, 409, 416.

53. „ 393.

54. „ 411.

55. „ 393.

56. „ 411.

57. „ 394, 397-8, 410.

58. R. Murray, *Symbols*, 138.

59. Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Blood and Water" in *Studies in John* (Bangalore: 1982) 146-160.

60. *BBRSO III*, 421.

61. J. Jeremias, *Theologische Worterbuch zum NT*, IV, 1098. Cfr. R. M. Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip" *Vig C* 25 (1971) 130.

God who is from eternity, on account of His love betrothed you as bride to Himself.⁶²

Father designed her on Mt. Sinai and spoke of it as the type of the Church.⁶³

Even the betrothal at Jordan was not a real one but only an ideal one; what was prefigured at Mt. Sinai is ideally happened at Jordan, yet the realization is to come and that happened when Christ betrothed her through the apostles. We can explicitate this idea through the words of H. Engberding. He says:

If somebody takes the baptism of Jesus at Jordan or the death of Christ on the cross as the moments of the betrothal, the apostles do not come into scene as being some help to Jesus. But the speaking on the apostles as the betrothers the East-Syrian tradition, passes from the ideal Church to the real Church which then apostles have begotten through their preaching and suffering for Christ. This was the task of the apostles and the help which Christ demanded of them.⁶⁴

In short, when we say Church as bride of Christ, it is an imagery even at the very act of betrothal, present in the divine economy of God; in the OT it is prefigured, in the life-time of Jesus it is ideally present and on the

pentecost and post-pentecostal period through the activities of the apostles it became a reality. In this three distinctive but closely related phases of one salvation history gradually revealed the mystery of the Church in terms of bride. And these three phases are represented by the three betrothers: Moses, John the baptist and apostles. Yet, the Church on earth is not a reality in its fullness. Because "Christ established the Church on earth on the type of the heavenly Jerusalem".⁶⁵ Consequently the Church at present is still a type, a type of the heavenly Church. More succinctly, the earthly Church is the actualization of the OT type and anticipation of the eschatological Church.

Blessed is He who has set up His Church on earth and finished her habitations on high...⁶⁶

Blessed is the One who has established His Church on earth and exalted her to set in heaven...⁶⁷

V. Adorned and Crowned Bride: Symbol of Eschatological Church

The Church, who is adorned and crowned, is filled with all sorts of heavenly blessings and graces is a recurring theme in the liturgical prayers especially in the period of *Qudash 'edta*. The adorning of the bride is the act of the Holy Trinity. Because, it is the Father who has depicted her beauty in

62. BBRSO III, 394.

63. BBRSO III, 424.

64. H. Engberding, "Kirche als Braut in der ostsyrischen Liturgie" OCP 3 (1937) 27.

65. BBRSO III, 395, 396, 399.

66. BBRSO III, 434.

67. BBRSO III, 402.

the prophets⁶⁸ and according to the predictions of the prophets perfected her beauty with gold⁶⁹. The jewel with which she is adorned by the Father is so glorious⁷⁰. Besides the adorning of the Father, the Son, the real bridegroom himself adorned and perfected her beauty 'spiritually'⁷¹ through his self-sacrifice.

Jesus the victorious king who came and saved her by his cross and adorned her in beauty and made her comely.⁷²

The ornaments by which the bride is adorned is faith, hope and charity.⁷³ Further through innocence, purity and chastity she is beautified.⁷⁴ Even though Christ has adorned his bride in spiritual beauties, it is from the Father this beauty comes⁷⁵ and finally it is the Holy Spirit who makes her beauty perfect.⁷⁶ The beauty of the bride is therefore divine and interior since it is said: "all the beauty of the daughter of the King is from within."⁷⁷

a. Adorned Bride as the Heavenly Jerusalem

The adorned and crowned bride is a symbol of the heavenly Church. She

is called also as the holy city, heavenly Jerusalem and the adorned bride of the Lamb. In the book of Revelation we read:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... I saw the holy city a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "behold, the dwelling of God is with men, He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself will be with them."⁷⁸

The most perfect type of the Church, ie, the heavenly Jerusalem is depicted here as "the dwelling of God is with men." According to the translation of King James Version, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them..." Here comes a merging of the imageries bride and the tabernacle both are presented as the heavenly Jerusalem. The liturgical prayer elucidates this as follows:

Blessed are you O holy Church,
blessed are you O adorned bride....

68. *BBRSO* III, 410.

69. *BBRSO* III, 410.

70. *BBRSO* III, 410.

71. *BBRSO* III, 399.

72. *BBRSO* III, 391.

73. *BBRSO* III, 400.

74. R. Murray, *Symbols*, 130.

75. *BBRSO* III, 431.

76. *BBRSO* III, 410.

77. Ps 45:13.

78. Rev 21:2.

blessed are you O tabernacle of glory..."⁷⁹

In the East-Syriac liturgical prayers just as the bride imagery, the tabernacle also has three phases of existence: the tabernacle that Moses has made in accordance with the model that God Himself has shown to him on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 25-27; 40), the reality of the Church that He founded on earth according to the type of His heavenly habitation⁸⁰ and the "greater and the more perfect tent not made with hands" (Heb 9:11). When we consider all the references concerning this theme in the liturgical prayers together with the biblical passages Ex. 25-27; 40; Heb 8-9 etc. we can make out the following conclusion: Church is on the one hand a type of God's dwelling presence on Mt. Sinai and that is concretely presented in the Bible as the tabernacle or the tent. On the other hand, Church is a type of the heavenly habitation where angels dwell. The first type refers to a past reality and the second type refers to the future reality. The Church is therefore the both: it is a type of the OT tabernacle as well as the type of the heavenly abode. First one is the prefiguration of the Church or the anticipation of the present reality of the Church. The second one is the eschatological fulfillment of the Church. This is what she expects; and this is what she ought to be. In the present

reality of the Church, the OT figure is realized and the eschatological reality is proleptically experienced. In this perspective Church is both an earthly and heavenly reality; a reality that is already and not yet. Thus says the liturgical prayer:

As you have made your presence to dwell on Mt. Sinai, and spoken of it as the type of your Church also at this moment O Lord God of hosts make your invincible strength to dwell in this holy temple....⁸¹

A haven of peace O Christ, you have founded on earth for your praisers on the type of your heavenly habitation...⁸²

O Christ...you redeemed your Church from the error of idols and made her a type of heaven where all the angels dwell...⁸³

The following words of St. Ephrem will substantiate what we have already said. While commenting on Ex. 25:9, he wrote:

By saying to him "you shall make everything according to the model of the tabernacle that I will show you", he first called it a model and a temporal tabernacle to indicate that it was transitory and that it would be replaced by the Church, the perfect prototype which lasts forever, and so that they would esteem it because of its likeness to the heavenly tabernacle.⁸⁴

79. *BBRSO* III, 434.

80. *BBRSO* III, 395.

81. *BBRSO* III, 400.

82. *BBRSO* III, 395.

83. *BBRSO* III, 398.

84. K. McVey (ed), *The Fathers of the Church, Vol 91: St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works* (Washington:1994)261.

b. Crowned Bride: Symbol of Victorious Church

The liturgical tradition speaks of the crowning of the Church the bride in a vivid manner.

....He (Christ) 'placed on your head the excellent and praiseworthy crown of glory.'⁸⁵

The one who crowned her is the King who is holy and his crown is indissoluble.⁸⁶ All the kings with their earthly crowns bow down before him and will adore him. Such a great and holy King of kings is the one who crowns her (Church).⁸⁷ The crown is prepared by nobody else but the Son of God, the bridegroom himself. He has given the crown of victory to his Church.⁸⁸

He has woven crown for her from the glorious rays of the light of his hidden Father placed them on her head and glorified her.⁸⁹

The adorned and crowned bride is a symbol of the victorious, glorious Church filled with all the heavenly blessings and graces. Such an image of the Church is described by the author of Revelation. In Rev. 12:1 we read: "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars". As it is evident from the Bible itself, the crown made up of twelve stars is an allusion to the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14) as

well as the tribes of Israel. However, the twelve apostles were themselves sent to the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Mt 10:6). Here we find a merging of the OT and the NT or the fulfillment of the OT and the NT in terms of the crown. Moreover, Rev. 12:1 has an allusion in Cant.6:10 and Is.60:19-20. Both can be applied to the symbolic woman but Is. 60:19-20 says of the city, the eschatological Zion. The symbolism of twelve is an indication to connect Rev. 12:1 to Rev.21 & 22 where the new Jerusalem is depicted. It is this number which marks the city as God's new Jerusalem (cf. Rev.21:9-14). In short, the crowned woman that is depicted in the book of Revelation is a figure of the adorned bride who is awaiting for the marriage of the Lamb, the bridegroom. The crowned woman is therefore the symbol of the redeemed and victorious bride who is the Church.

vi Wedding Feast as the Eschatological Banquet

The liturgical tradition speaks of the final dedication of the Church in terms of the wedding feast. According to the Syriac tradition, an anticipation of this wedding feast happened at baptism. The wedding feast at baptism will be fulfilled in the eschata. About this the book of Revelation says: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage banquet of the Lamb".⁹⁰ It is the bridegroom himself prepares

85. *BBRSO* III,430.

86. „ 406.

87. „ 432.

88. „ 436.

89. „ 432.

90. Rev. 19:9.

the wedding feast, which is of spiritual character, and invites the guests: the guests includes the apostles, prophets, martyrs, teachers and shepherds⁹¹ and the heavenly as well as earthly choirs. He has called all the generations to come and to give their marriage gifts at the wedding feast of the Church.⁹² The invited came to the wedding feast with their own gifts symbolizing their life.

The priests came and set before her their ranks, and the prophets placed alongside their revelations, and the apostles placed alongside their preaching and the martyrs set before her the blood of their neck and the heavenly hosts their holy, holy, holy and all the peoples their adorations.⁹³

The bridegroom himself prepares the items for the banquet⁹⁴ and he gives his body as food and his blood as the chalice of salvation.⁹⁵

Taking into consideration all the above said passages concerning the invited, the food that serves at the banquet etc. we can notice again the coherence of the Old and New Testaments. The prophets and the apostles, the manna and the body of Christ (Eucharist) etc. are some

examples to this continuity. This again shows the place of the Church in the whole salvific plan of God begins with the OT period to the eschata. However the presence of the earthly as well as the heavenly beings widens the time and space aspect of the Church. In other words we cannot limit the Church in the horizontal level of the linear history but it is far beyond.

vii Final Communion in the Bridechamber

Bridechamber is the place where the deep and intimate love of the bride and bridegroom is shared. It is a symbol of delight and joy. The joy of the wedding feast is expressed in terms of singing with the harp and clapping with the hands.

Rejoice in Him, O Church at your wedding feast. Clap your hands on the day of your wedding feast. Sing praise with your harp because He has adorned you with a splendid crown.⁹⁶

In the case of marriage between Christ and the Church, the bride chamber is the eternal, spiritual⁹⁷ and delightful abode in heaven.⁹⁸ This glorious⁹⁹ chamber of light¹⁰⁰ is set up above the vigilants¹⁰¹

91. BBRSO III, 432.

92. „ 432

93. „ 432

94. „ 410

95. „ 429.

96. „ 434.

97. P. Sorci, *“Il Tema della Chiesa-Sposa nelle liturgie nuziali” Ho Theologos 1* (1983) 86.

98. BBRSO III, 394.

99. „ 410.

100. „ 411.

101. „ 413.

in the unutterable¹⁰² and divine holy of holies.¹⁰³ The Holy Spirit has interwoven this bride chamber.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless the liturgical prayer see this as the continuation as well as the fulfillment of the bride chamber on Mt. Sinai. Even in this case we can notice a stress on the continuity between the OT and the NT.

The Son of God has made a great wedding feast for the Church which he betrothed. He has fixed her bride chamber on Mt. Sinai through the son of Amram (Moses) with great splendid.¹⁰⁵

It is in the bride chamber that the ultimate aim of God's *medabbranutha* is fulfilled and that is *shawtaputha*, the real and perfect union or communion of all with God is realized. Hence the joy of the bride in the heavenly bride chamber is eternal,¹⁰⁶ so great and splendid that the angels themselves desire it.¹⁰⁷ This joy come out of intimate love and union with the bridegroom. The liturgical tradition expresses it so beautifully in the following words:

Jesus is mine and I am His. He has pleased me and clothed me and I have put on him. With kisses of his lips he embraced me and led me to the bridal chamber on high.¹⁰⁸

6. Conclusion

Till now we were describing the mystery of the Church through certain imageries found in the liturgical prayers. As a result we understood that the Church is a divine mystery *raza'* revealed in and through the history of salvation and it is moving towards the eschata for its realization, ie, communion with God. She is also an earthly reality originates from the divine activity of the triune God. Yet, she is sinful hence needs purification. At the same time she is the spring of sanctification for all by the grace of her founder. Her place in the divine economy gives her a whole pervasive and all embracing character.

Our study demonstrates also the "source" character of liturgy for theologization and the richness of the symbolic language used in the liturgical prayers. It is in the liturgical prayer the Bible and the Tradition coincide; revelation and Faith manifest; mystery and history encounter and the divine and the human meet together. Consequently it is the proper milieu in which the *raza'* is revealed and the *shawtaputha* is achieved. Hence by all means we can say the liturgy is the "*Locus theologicus*" and the ecclesiology in its profundity is liturgical ecclesiology.

Sr. Sophy Rose C M C

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102. BBR SQ III 425.
 103. „ 429.
 104. „ 410.
 105. „ 432.
 106. „ 438.
 107. „ 410.
 108. „ 411.

Ecclesiological Implications of the Odes of Solomon

Introductory Remarks

The Odes of Solomon¹ are a collection of 42 poetic themes of the early Church. The Odes were discovered by J. R. Harris, in Syria, in 1907 comprising 40 Odes and 18 Psalms of Solomon. Hence the name Odes of Solomon². They are 42 poems or hymns for congregational use. While the likelihood of multiple authorship has periodically been raised, single authorship has never been decisively questioned³. The Odes of Solomon are apparently the earliest surviving work in Syriac⁴. Hence for the churches belonging to the Syriac tradition, this is of capital importance. At the same time the Odes of Solomon are one of the most attractive, and at the same time, most enigmatic output of early Christianity⁵. They are the lost hymns of the early Church referred to by the Fathers

of the Church as the Odes of Solomon⁶. One of the main reasons that biblical scholars have tended to overlook the Odes is the general belief that they are heretical and so have little to say to the main stream of the biblical tradition.⁷ They have been shelved and stamped as gnostic literature. The Odes of Solomon are a neglected key for unlocking the historical and theological enigmas of John.⁸

The Odes are published with a commentary by J. R. Harris and A. Mingana at Cambridge university in 1916-20. A second Syriac manuscript was discovered by F. C. Burkitt in the British Museum in 1912. The majority of the intellectuals who have examined the Odes in recent years presume its authorship near Edessa or perhaps in the outskirts of Antioch, during the second or early third century. Drijvers argues for a

1. The Odes of Solomon, The Syriac Texts, edited with translation and notes by James Hamilton Charlesworth (University of Montana: 1977). In this article all the references to the odes are from this book.
2. A. Berardino (ed), Encyclopedia of the Early Church, Vol II, (Cambridge: 1992), 609.
3. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs in the Odes of Solomon", *Studia Patristica*, Vol. XX. 1986, 182.
4. R. Murray, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom*, (Cambridge: 1975), 25.
5. Brock, *Review of the Odes of Solomon*, edited with translation and notes by J. H. Charlesworth, Oxford, 1973, JBL xciii, 1974, 623-5.
6. J. H. Charlesworth. "The Odes of Solomon-Not Gnostic" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (1969), 357.
7. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon...". 357.
8. J. H. Charlesworth and R. A. Culpepper, "The Odes of Solomon and the Gospel of John" *CBQ* 35 (1973), 298.

notably later date of c. 275 on grounds of presumed anti-Manichaean contentions in Ode 38 and perceived influences of Tatian's Diatessaron in the Odes.⁹

Style

The Odes are written in the style and method of the psalms of the OT or the Hodayot of the dead sea scroll, their verses regularly depicting couplets or triplets of analogous or diverging thoughts. The images examined are multifarious, and occasionally unfamiliar, and the meaning proposed by the author is usually further clouded by his tendency for double meaning.¹⁰

The milieu certainly seems judeo-christian, not sectarian-Gnostic, and perhaps not far in date and milieu from the 4th gospel and Ignatius¹¹. "As early as 1910 H. Gunkel presented the thesis that the Odes are a gnostic hymnbook of the second century a. d.; shortly thereafter numerous scholars defended his hypothesis. In the last decades such distinguished scholars as H. M. Schenke, R. M. Grant, S. Schulz, F. M. Braun, and H. Jonas have argued for the similarity between the

Odes and Gnostic literature, especially the Gospel of Truth and the Hymn of the Pearl".¹²

To read and re-read the Odes of Solomon is to be brought in touch with apparently the most vivacious, ardent and lively christian background in the period roughly 100-170¹³. No writer not even Ignatius has quite bared his soul to us in the way that the odist has. He pours out to us his feelings, in an uninhibited manner. One might call the Odes a characteristic song book from the early second century. As such it provides an appealing look into one segment of early christianity, likely somewhere in Syria¹⁴.

Influence of Docetism and Gnosticism

Docetism, the mythological view that Jesus only appears to be a man but was really an angelic redeemer of celestial substance, must not be confused or equated with Gnosticism. The Odes show no trace of dualism characteristic of the principal Gnostic system. There is no unanimity of opinion in this regard. "The Odes are considered by some as products of an early Jewish Christian

9. H. Hess, *Salvation Motifs...*, 182. (Cf. also Brian McNeil, *The Odes of Solomon and the Scriptures*, *Oriens Christianus* 67 (1983), L. Abramowski, *Sprache und Abfassungszeit der Odes Salomos*, *Oriens Christianus* 68 (1984). Cf. also "Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Mani. Christians and Manichaeans in Third Century Syria", in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (Festschrift für G. Quispel, 1981, 117-130. The majority of scholars argue for a Greek origin, though some stand for the Syriac (Mikloschazy, 24).
10. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs...", 182
11. Murray, *Symbols...* 25
12. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon..." 357-8
13. J. E. Morgan-Wynne "The Experience of the Spirit in the Odes of Solomon", *Studia Patristica* xviii, 3, 1989, 173
14. J. E. Morgan-Wynne "The Experience of the Spirit...", 173

Gnosticism and by others as non-Gnostic hymns related to the Hodayot from the Qumran community"¹⁵. To contend, therefore, that the christology of the Odes is sometimes docetic does not suggest that it is fully gnostic. It is true that the christology of the Odes is influenced by docetic tendencies¹⁶.

The Language

It is certain that the 42 Odes were originally written in Greek in the second half of the second century¹⁷. The circumstances are the judeo-christian community in Syria. Even if it was originally composed in Greek, the syriac translation could not have been long delayed. It is quite likely that Aphrahat, who did not know Greek, knew the Odes. In any case the translation was done before Ephrem, in whose hymns we can observe the same atmosphere as in the Odes¹⁸.

The Odes of Solomon A Theological Work

The Syriac text of the Odes of Solomon is in itself a monument of the first importance for grasping exactly the beliefs and experiences of the primitive Church¹⁹. The Odes are to be considered as a theological work. The theology of the Odes is that of the trinitarian God,

Creator and Saviour precisely that of the great ecclesiastical tradition. Their mystical doctrine is based on concrete accomplishment of salvation, acquired in Jesus Christ, dead and risen. This brings its significance in praise, thanksgiving and profession of faith²⁰. The Christology of the Odes is described by some as docetic, by others as perfectly orthodox²¹. Many commentators have already pointed out its docetic christology. There is indeed a vagueness as to the humanity assumed by the Word. "I was not their brother, nor was my birth like theirs"²². But the obscurity may be the product of a functional Christology expressed in the language of a theological environment that was more anxious with salvation by enlightenment from above and mysterious union of the redeemed with God than with the question of incarnation²³. In the Odes there are no profound intellectual questions on incarnation. The Odist asserts that the Saviour is capable of saving us because he himself has been saved.

God's Revelation as a Mystery

The Odes present God as a mystery. On the one hand the Trinity manifests Himself to the Creation through the Son who freed the latter from darkness and

15. Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syriac Christianity" JTS xxxi (1980), 337

16. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon..." 364

17. Encyclopedia of the Early Church, 609

18. A. Mikloshazy, *East Syriac Eucharistic Pneumatology* (Rome: 1968), 25

19. J. R. Harris, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, (Cambridge: 1911), 89

20. Encyclopedia of the Early Church, 609

21. Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon...", 337

22. Odes 28: 17.

23. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs...", 183

gave it back to the Father through the Spirit. On the other hand, God and His creation are one because everything is from Him²⁴. "Your flesh shall not know what I say to you, nor your garment what I declare to you"²⁵. Human nature is not able to understand God. His word is a mystery. The word mystery itself is not often met but it is frequently said that man receives knowledge from Christ. This would have been impossible if Christ had not adapted himself to human perception by becoming like us: "He made himself known without envy in his simplicity, because his kindness made small his greatness. He became like I am, so that I was able to grasp him. He appeared in a form similar to mine, so that I was able to put him on"²⁶. The knowledge which Christ reveals is the knowledge about God: "Hear the word of truth, and receive the knowledge of the Most High"²⁷. This knowledge is the knowledge of truth or the ways of the Lord. This way leads to perfection²⁸. Man can be saved by taking off the body, madness or corruption.

He puts on his new garments, incorruptibility or the grace of the Lord.²⁹ This means life from death. Without Christ man is supposed to be dead and living in the realm of death. Christ opened the way to God and opened the gates of sheol: "He made me rise from the depth of sheol. He freed me from the mouth of death"³⁰. "In outline the Odes of Solomon and Addai are in agreement. ... Christ was sent to the world to reveal knowledge about God. He clears a way from death to life. We may add that this way is one of taking off the body and putting on the garments of life or the Spirit"³¹. This aspect of Christology is strikingly Syrian.³²

H. Chadwick argues that the Odes are indeed orthodox christian, but represent a christianity of an unusual kind. Similar thoughts have been expressed by R. M. Grant: "The Christianity of the Ancient Near East was by no means an accurately and dogmatically defined as that of the regions more influenced by Rome"³³. Odes resist all systematization

24. S. Abouzayod, *Ibidayutha: A Study of Singleness in the Syrian Orient. From Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon* (Oxford: 1993), 15
25. Ode 8: 9.
26. Ode 3, 4.
27. Ode 8: 8.
28. Klijn, "Influence of Jewish Theology on the Odes of Solomon and The Acts of Thomas", in *Aspects du judeo-christianisme. colloque de Strasbourg* (Paris:1965), 173
29. Klijn, "Influence...", 173
30. Ode 29: 4.
31. Klijn, "Influence...", 173
32. Cf. My "Acts of Thomas Deserves More Theological and Ecclesiological Attention" CO xvii (1996), 3-19; The Teaching of Addai A Christological Masterpiece" CO xvii (1996), 190-203
33. Grant, "The Odes of Solomon and the Church of Antioch" JBL lxxiii, 1944, 363.

and it is not certain where in christian tradition they are to be located. Apart from one apparent quotation in Ephrem, they have not left clear traces of influence in Syriac literary history³⁴. Because of the peculiar nature of the Odes very often they are unbridgeable with other writings even of the same tradition.

The Mystery of God is Revealed as Trinity

The Odes manifest the belief in the Trinity or better in the three Divine Persons. Ode 23 deals with the heavenly letter written and sent by God to men. The image refers to God's revelation or self-communication. The self-revealing God is always the content of all profound theologies. In that sense Odes are typically theological.

And the letter was a great Tablet
which was wholly written by the Finger
of God
and the name of the Father was on it
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
to rule for ever and ever. Hallelujah³⁵

The Spirit and the Divine Milk³⁶,

A Cup of milk was offered to me
and I drank it in the sweetness of the
delight of the Lord;
The Son is the cup
and He who milked Him is the Holy
Spirit
Because His breasts were full

and it was not desirable to Him, that
His milk should
be spilt to no purpose
And the Holy Spirit opened His bosom
and mingled the milk of the two breasts
of the Father
and gave the mixture to the world without
their knowing
And those who take it are in the full-
ness of the right hand³⁷.

The Divine milk expresses the Self-communication of God. It is a lofty theology in a harsh metaphor³⁸. In Odes 8,16; 25,5 also are references to this. In Clement of Alexandria and in Irenaeus also can we see statements like this. The breasts of the Father refer to the motherly aspect of God which is a frequently recurring theme in the early syriac writings. In the Odes the Spirit milks the Father, opens his bosom, mingles the milk, and gives the mixture to the world. The text gives a poetic account of incarnation. The Son has the milk of the Father; the Father manifests himself in the Son. The impelling force to do this is the Spirit.

The Spirit as Dove.³⁹

At least an implicit reference to the manifestation of the Trinity can be found in Ode 24:1. The Dove flew over the head of our Lord the Messiah because He was her head. And she sang over

34. Murray, Symbols of the Church...25

35. Ode 23: 21-22.

36. Mikloshazy, The East Syriac Eucharistic Pneumatology, 27

37. Ode 19:1.

38. Mikloshazy, The East Syriac Eucharistic Pneumatology, 27

39. Mikloshazy, The East Syriac Eucharistic Pnuematology, 29

him and her voice was heard. Most probably here we have the baptism of Christ, when the spirit came down in the form of a dove and fluttered over Christ.

The Spirit as Mother of Christians

The grammatical gender of the Syriac noun ruha (fem.) has facilitated the process of making a feminine being out of the Holy Spirit. In the Gnostic literature the pneuma often appears as the heart or womb of the Father, that is the feminine element in God, the Mother of the Word. While the Father represents the infinity, the Mother is the sweetness and kindness of God⁴⁰.

In the Odes the Spirit of the Lord appears as the mother of the Christians. Ode 36,1-8 obviously deals with the new birth of Christians at Baptism. The kiss of the Spirit confers immortal life; the Spirit Himself becomes its eternal principle in them: "As the wings of doves over their nestlings, and the mouths of their nestlings toward their mouths, so also are the wings of the Spirit over my heart".⁴¹

At Baptism the garment of immortality lost in Paradise, has been recovered.⁴² "I was covered with the covering of thy Spirit, and I removed from me the raiment of skins"⁴³. This is the principal theology of Baptism in the later Syriac writers also. In that sense the Odes have an authentic main-line theological vision.

Thinking about Christ's baptism in Jordan Ephrem says that Jesus came and mixed the invisible Spirit in the visible water so that those who would receive His Baptism might receive the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ The water that came out of Christ's pierced side is seen as the water that purifies man from slavery and together with the blood from Christ's side is said to be the Church, that is, the symbol of the Church, of which the life is nourished by the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.⁴⁵

"Among them there is no one that is naked because they have put on the garment of glory. Nor is there any one that is clothed in leaves and stands with shame because through our Lord they have found the garment of the proto-parents. While the Church purifies her ears from the words of the serpent whom they ie. the protoparents heard and were tarnished through it, those who had lost their garments through the protoparents become new and white".⁴⁶

An Ecclesial and Eucharistic Vision

The ecclesiological implications of the Odes is to be seen in their salvation motifs. The Odes of Solomon are rich in salvation motifs, for their central thrust is the praiseful proclamation of the perfection which awaits the believer in God's redeeming love. The praise verbs and praise language used in the Odes

40. Mikloszazy, The East Syriac Eucharistic Pneumatology, 30
41. Ode 28:1.
42. This is one of the most central themes of early Syriac theology.
43. Ode 25:8.
44. CSCO 270/Syr 116, P 51-2
45. EC Syr 21:11
46. CSCO 174/Syr 78. p. 21

are characteristic of their Syriac theological perspectives.⁴⁷ The Odes are also best expressions of looking at theology as God experience. Baptismal and also presumably ecclesiological and possibly eucharistic motifs are woven into the work as well, recurrently overlapping the soteriological. This synthetic aspect of theology is also characteristically Syriac. There are one hundred diverse salvation patterns in the Odes.⁴⁸

The oriental theology in general envisages the mission of Christ and the Church in a soteriological perspective. The salvation patterns are the main-line concern. Today, it is the Church that serves as the instrument of salvation. In the official teaching of the Church, especially in Vatican II we can note the theme of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.⁴⁹ A large number of Vat. II's commentators are ecclesiologists and many of them are well known for their treatise on Church and salvation.⁵⁰ Hence the priority which the Odes of Solomon give on salvation is a legitimate one and it is in this perspective that we can speak of the Odes as ecclesiological. One may not find in the Odes a scientific and systematic ecclesiology in the modern sense of the word but one cannot deny their ecclesial vision. The Odes are not considering the reality of the Church as an object to be analysed but

as the subject of every theologization. The different poetic pieces of Odes keep in a vibrant manner the notion of Revelation, the mystery of the triune God, the mystery of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the holy Eucharist and the mystery of salvation. These are ample evidences to articulate the ecclesial vision of the Odes. In that sense there is a sound ecclesiology in the Odes which can be named as trinitarian ecclesiology, pneumatological ecclesiology, eucharistic ecclesiology or a soteriologically determined ecclesiology etc. Within the Odes there is very little indication of any ecclesiastical hierarchy or set ministry. Rather than an intellectual systematic ecclesiology, the Odes maintain a profound ecclesial vision of divine truth.

Church as Bride and Christ as Bridegroom

The syriac tradition always considers the Church as the bride and Christ as the bridegroom. The earliest example of this imagery in Syriac literature are expressions of personal devotion rather than teaching about the Church but the latter can hardly be absent. "Like the arm of the bridegroom over the bride, so is my yoke over those who know me, and as the bridechamber that is spread in the marriage-house, so is my love over those that believe in me"⁵¹ In the very obscure ode 38, 9-12, we

47. The East Syriac Liturgical Texts are typical examples of praise language and praise verbs.

48. L. Goppelt, *Les origines de l'Eglise*, (Paris: 1961), 41

49. Vat II, LG I, 8, 48 etc.

50. R. Latourelle, *Vatican II : Assessment and Perspective*. Vols 1, 2, 3, (London: 1989).

51. Ode 42:8-9.

find the bride adorned, but also 'corrupted', by a bridegroom who corrupts and is corrupted, in contrast with the beloved. The false bridegroom is presumably false doctrine rather than the personification of natural marriage⁵².

The odist has a very deep salvation theology. Its salvation theology is to be understood within the general theological framework. The God of the Odes is the one Creator, redeemer God who is most regularly named the Most High or the Lord. It is the Most High who has created the cosmos, and this has been accomplished by his Word. The creation is good and inherently redeemable from its unhappy thralldom to iniquity. It is not clearly stated that the material creation itself is the cause of the condition of the estrangement of humanity from the Most High. In fact the odist enthusiastically outdates the *felix culpa* theology in stating, 'incorruptible was the way and thy face; thou hast brought thy world to corruption that everything might be resolved and renewed' ⁵³.

Soteriological Categories of the Odes

Odes of Solomon are clearly a corrective to the later Scholastic onesided theology of the ontology of Christ. In order to combine together the ontology and soteriology we need to look back into the soteriological motives of writings like Odes of Solomon. H. Hess in his excellent study has thoroughly bro-

ught out the soteriological categories and dimensions.⁵⁴ In his attempt to highlight the deeper dimensions of soteriology he divides his study into four sections:

1. the Evils from which the redeemed are delivered—error, death, darkness, chains, evil one, deceiver, ignorance, chasms, sheol, sickness, vanity, dragon, evil poison, drugs of error, folly, hatred etc.⁵⁵
- 2) agencies or modes of God's saving activity.
 - a) divine agencies or titles: grace, word, way, water, name, righthand, truth, light, head, life, mouth, knowledge, sign, door, glory, love, Messiah, power, saviour, circumcision, face, heart, virgin, rock.
 - b) Modalities of saving expressed in verbal forms: reveal, open, lift up, lead, love, bring forth, capture, incarnate, rise, enter, give life, overthrow, rescue, transform.
- 3) effects of redemption: renewal of the inner person, clothing, immortal life, eternal life, fruits, knowledge of the Lord, truth, love, incorruptible, light, crown, joy, justification, heart, peace, perfection, understanding, milk, victory, blessing, dew, intoxicate, strength, yoke, glory, word.
- 4) status of the redeemed: rest in the Lord, belonging to the Lord, the Lord's planting, paradise, blessed, holy ones, in the Lord's land, freedom, inscribed in the book, lived in the beloved, perfected, sons of the Most High, at the right hand, in the true covenant, of the Lord's Legion, on the rock of truth, the Lord's people.⁵⁶

52. Murray, *Symbols of the Church*..., 133

53. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs...", 183

54. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." esp. 184-189.

55. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." 184

56. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." 189

"What is unique to the soteriology of the Odes is the proportionate emphasis given amongst the motifs and the perspectives that consequently emerge. It is in large measure the emphasis on truth, knowledge, light, rest, perfection and incorruptibility that have led some earlier commentators to classify the Odes as gnostic. Indeed the Odes say very little about the redemptive power of the cross, the sin is never mentioned".⁵⁷

Yet the odist's soteriology seems clearly to presuppose the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Messiah. It seems simply that these events in saving history, so, strongly emphasised by the traditions encompassed by the NT, were not among the odist's central interests, nor, presumably were they emphasized within the milieu in which his theology was shaped⁵⁸. Thus it avoids the normal pattern of theologizing and preserves a unique type of doing theology. Reference to the Lord's resurrection is obscure. For the odist, the resurrection of the Messiah and his exaltation are inseparably tied together, and it is likely that in reference to the exaltation the resurrection is to be presupposed⁵⁹. This is also a fundamental characteristic of Syriac christology. The conversion experience is seen in terms of illumination. The implication is that God's light has replaced the former darkness in his life.

The experience of being filled with the spirit is a central part of the conversion experience.⁶⁰

Christ and Wisdom

Odes have a very deep christology. Christ has been described with characteristics taken from Jewish wisdom. There is striking agreements between Odes and the Wisdom of Solomon.⁶¹ According to the wisdom of Solomon wisdom has been sent out of the holy heavens to the earth (9,10), in order to guide men 7, 12; 9,11; 10,10; 10,12; 10,17, in the ways of the Lord 10,17. She gives knowledge and reveals the mysteries of God 2,22; 2,13; 6,15; 6,22; that man may be saved 9,18; 10,19, and be renewed 7,27. This means that he will be saved from death 2,24; hades 1,4; and corruption 2,23; 6,18.⁶² The identification of Christ with Wisdom, gave rise to two difficulties. It was impossible to fit the incarnation and the death of Christ into the ideas about wisdom. Wisdom has relationship with man by living with him in fellowship or by resting in him but that is no incarnation in the christian sense of the word. This is why in the Odes of Solomon both the incarnation and the work of Christ, his death and resurrection, have been neglected⁶³. Odes do not speak of the Son 'putting on the body', but of our putting on Christ 7,4; 33,12, his holiness 13,3 or his name 39,3.

57. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." 189

58. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." 189

59. H. Hess, "Salvation Motifs..." 190

60. J. E. Morgan, "The Experience of the Spirit..." 174

61. Klijn, "The Influence..." 174

62. Klijn, "The Influence..." 175

63. Klijn, "The Influence..." 175

Cryptic Aspect of Christological Doctrine

"Though the Odes contain a considerable amount of Christian doctrine, they do so in a cryptic way. This might be due to the *disciplina arcani*, or perhaps it can be explained by the pseudoepigraphical character of the Odes, whose authorship is attributed to Solomon of the Old Testament. Thus, there are christological references, yet the name of Jesus never occurs. Neither the OT nor the NT is quoted directly. There are several allusions to Baptism, yet it is never mentioned as such, and there is not so much a hint of the Eucharist"⁶⁴. Thus in the history of theology, the Odes occupy a very peculiar type of theological approach. Actually we need some theological and hermeneutical principles to interpret the inner meanings of the theological stand of the Odes.

A Joyous and Symbolic Theology

These are two typical traits of oriental theology. "The odes are not rebellious but joyous, not speculatively allegorical but naively symbolical, not polemically Jewish but Jewish Christian. Great weight must be given to the general observation that the mood of the Odes is not gnostic"⁶⁵. Charlesworth's study is a powerful document of the non-Gnostic character of the Odes.⁶⁶ The Odes of Solomon, often considered a hallucinating Jewish Christian hymns of salvation dating back to the very

dawn of the Church, turn out to be highly symbolic with a very contemplating expressions which are based on second century Antiochene theology. In particular the last ode is a typical example of concealed manner of polemic which constantly presupposes a substantial knowledge of Christian and Manichean doctrine of symbolisms⁶⁷.

"In the development of Syriac theology Ode 19 and the other Odes of Solomon should be placed between the Antiochene theologians of the end of the second century - Irenaeus, Justinus, Theophilus, - and Ephrem at the end of the fourth century. Its theological ideas contain a working out of second-century conceptions directed through text and structure of the Diatessaron, and therefore a date in the first half of the third century or later is most likely. Like the theology of the second century in this region, it is a doctrine of re-capitulation, how to regain paradise lost, which is also characteristic of Ephrem. They form a link between Ephrem's works and theology and his theological and literary antecedents. Thus it becomes possible to bring theological writings and ideas from the Syrian area into a chronological order to sketch a historical development starting in the second half of the second century somewhere in or around Antioch and provisionally ending with Ephrem, with whom a new historical phase in Syriac theology begins"⁶⁸.

64. Mikloshazy, *The East Syriac Eucharistic Pneumatology*, 26

65. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon..." 306

66. Cf also his "Qumran, John and the Odes of Solomon" in John and Qumran (ed. Charlesworth), London, 1972, 107-137

67. Drijvers, "Facts and Problems..." 167

68. Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon....", 355

Odes are Mystical

"If it will be accepted that mysticism is primarily an experienced relationship with the transcendent which is grasped intuitively by the individual, then the Odes are not gnostic but they are mystic"⁶⁹. In retrospect it is safe to say that the Odes are not gnostic. In prospect it appears probable that the Odes are a tributary to gnosticism⁷⁰.

The Gospel of John and the Odes come from the same religious and spiritual environment. "Continued research may eventually indicate that the Odist probably had been an Essene, though perhaps a non - Qumran Essene, who composed the Odes in the Johannine community or school. If this reconstruction is correct, the Odes have begun to unlock the historical enigmas of John and promise to be a most important key to the theological mysteries"⁷¹.

The Eschatological Vision

In the Odes of Solomon the Odist compares his work of praise to that of a

helmsman steering his ship, and speaks of himself as transported by the truth 'as in a chariot' which, after various perils by land and sea, 'became for me a haven of salvation.'⁷²

Ode 38 describes the way of Truth to salvation as a journey in a chariot. It is a movement to the safe haven. The symbolism of ship and haven, which is very frequent in patristic literature is rather rare in the Syriac area. "Recent research, however, has made close that the Odes contain outspoken anti-Marcionite polemics, that they express christological conceptions in a highly symbolic and reflective wording that are based on second century Antiochene theology with all its philosophical terminology, that they betray the influence of Tatian's Diatessaron and encratitic interpretation of Christian tradition, and therefore, originate in a bilingual culture and most likely are to date to the third century. Considering the anti-Marcionite tendency, the encratitic elements and the philosophical terminology, Edessa with its sophisticated culture could very well be their place of origin"⁷³.

69. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon...." 369

70. Charlesworth, "The Odes of Solomon..." 369

71. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon and the Gospel of John", 320-1

72. Murray, *Symbols of the Church*, 250

73. Drijvers, "Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Mani. Christians and Manichaeans in Third Century Syria", *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: 1981), 117-8.

Concluding Remarks

The Odes of Solomon are fascinating theological means to enter into the land of apocrypha. A vast amount of apocryphal literature has come into existence before the emergence of dogmatic formulations. Many of the dogmatic formulations have been developed in the Greco-Roman world. The oriental apocryphal literature brings about another type of theological thinking. They may not have a definitive systematic formulation of a dogmatic pattern. Today, among the linguistically skilled theologians there is an earnest attempt to consider the apocrypha as theological works. Among the apocryphal writings

there are very many original thinking and theological streams of thought. In the field of Syriac christianity it is all the more true. They express the genius of the primitive christianity, the very origin of christianity and christian centres. In an era of going back to the sources of theology, the apocryphal writings are to be studied once again to get into the very theological identity of the ancient christianity. They are not anti-dogmatic but doctrinal. They are not merely descriptive but deeply theological. The Odes of Solomon occupy a very unique position both in methodology and in content. It includes all the main-line christian doctrines.

Joseph Kallarangatt

The Asian Synod - a call to collaboration

The preparation for the Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod for Asia has now entered a crucial stage. The *Lineamenta* is already received. This document is the basis for an Asia-wide discussion on the Synodal theme "Jesus Christ, the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (Jn. 10,10)". At this stage the Synodal Secretariat needs the co-operation and prayers of every one and every section of the church, if the Synod is to prove fruitful.

We certainly need prayers for the success of this great ecclesial event. The Synod (Special Assembly) is not a secular event or a social get together. It is an ecclesial event where the Spirit has to be the prime mover. And the hearts of the participants are to be wide open to Christ, whose servants they are. At the Synod we are to be handling themes related to the church the body of Christ in Asia. It is not our dreams and desires, but the will of the Lord that has to be manifested and has to be translated into programmes and projects. For this, preparations at other levels also are necessary-but prayer is supremely important. In every family and in every parish the faithful should now remind themselves of this duty to pray for the Synod till its very conclusion.

Co-operation also is needed from every side if an event like this is to be organised properly and to have its full impact on the future of Asia, a vast and complex continent. The success of the Synod will depend to a great extent on our contribution to the collective thinking we make at this stage of the preparation. A realisation of the complexity of the situation will be brought home to the final deliberations only if studied responses come from the various local churches and groups. If the experience of evangelisation in different places is reflected in the answers to the questions the Synodal Fathers will be able to draw mature conclusions. The depth and breadth of the discussions in the Synod will depend to a large extent on the document 'Instrumentum Laboris' which will be prepared on the basis of our responses to the *Lineamenta*.

We can in our discussion on the theme easily draw valuable lessons from the long history of evangelisation among the Asian people. Missionary methods have come under severe attack in Asia and we have the duty of repenting and making amends. But the heroic sacrifices of the past, the witness and zeal of the Missionaries of the past should also be an inspiration for the future. The efforts of the present day church also offer great hope for the future.

Undoubtedly the church in Asia is to be truly the leaven among the people of various secular and religious traditions, of this vast continent. Living in a multi-religious context the meaning of various religious traditions in the salvific design of the one God has been in recent times a matter of serious discussion. Together with many clarifications, a certain confusion and ambiguity also have been noticed in recent thinking. The upcoming Synod provides us an opportunity to discern with the help of the Spirit more about the way the Spirit has been drawing all mankind to the summit of history. A clear understanding of the mutual relationship between Christianity and the other world religions will be a significant step in the dialogue of religions that has already begun in various parts of Asia.

For us the core of our faith is that "Jesus Christ is God's Good News of Salvation to the whole world". Our faith tells us in unmistakable terms that He came from God so that all people may have life-and have it abundantly. Any one who denies that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life cannot be a christian. As the Holy Father has put it "This definite self revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself [AAS 83 (1991) 254]".

We know it as a fact that Jesus Christ is the one and the only Saviour of mankind in the full sense of the term. At the same time we have to explain in a convincing way the presence of the 'seeds of truth' in all religions and their relation to the Word become flesh. The various attempts to explain this have given rise to uneasiness among some. Certain exaggerations have disturbed ecclesiastical authorities and upset missionaries. Discussions before and during the Synod should help us to clarify our thinking in this area and to formulate coherent policies for evangelisation in the future.

Jesus came not simply to preach a set of doctrines or to impose a code of ascetical precepts but to offer the gift of life in its fullness. This is what we have to explain to the Asian mind. Asia is yearning for life-it is a fuller life that is being sought in Asia. And it is life in fullness that we have in Jesus. He died in order to restore life to us. The mission of the Church, continuing the life and ministry of Jesus, is to offer this life to all, to share this life with every one who earnestly desires it.

It is the Church that most people misunderstand. They consider the Church as an organisation, a welfare establishment or an efficient enterprise. In truth it is the community where God reveals the inner mystery of His life and communicates it to

the people. It is in the mystery of Trinitarian communion that we become the sign and instrument of the communion between God and humanity. The intimate communion that should exist in the Church is a lesson that has to be emphasised by the Synod. The church should be enabled to live as an exemplary community of perfect love and mutual regard. Charity must be seen as the supreme law of the Church. Anything that offends charity is a heinous crime.

The Asian Synod would provide an opportunity to explain and assimilate the ecclesiology of communion in all its dimensions. The role of the individuals, the relation between various sections in the church, the nature and mission of various churches within the Catholic communion, the approach to churches outside the Catholic communion—all these have to be understood and lived out in the light of this ecclesiology. Only then will the church be able to give a convincing witness to the world.

It is from this deep communion in the spirit of love that the mission of the church takes shape. Christian love naturally erupts into the arena of the world as service. Church is a communion that wants to share its life and riches with all others. It is by sharing this Trinitarian love and by serving others that the church seeks to bring all into unity with the Lord. To the extent the Church becomes filled with love and inspired to serve others, she becomes the sacrament of Christ and the sacrament of unity.

The Asian Synod will provide an excellent opportunity to look into the various aspects of the mission of love and service which the church has in the present and in the future. In this evaluation and planning all have the chance to express their mind—especially at this stage of its preparation. It is by discussing the Lineamenta, and especially the questions presented in it—that everyone can make a contribution. The “working paper” to be presented at the Synod itself will be largely the fruit of the discussions held at this stage. The ‘Lineamenta’ and its questions should be discussed at every level and the results presented to the diocesan Bishop. It is his responsibility to consolidate the findings of the local church and send this to the CBCI - before the end of March 1997 so that the Conference can finalise the document to be sent to the Synodal Secretariat in Rome. The Conference has been informed that its conclusions should reach Rome before the first of Aug. 1997.

I hope all the readers of this journal will use this opportunity to contribute to the planning of the church for the Third Millennium.

Archbishop Joseph Powathil
President, Catholic Bishop's Conference of India

Book Review

Xavier Koodapuzha, *Oriental Churches An Introduction*, Kottayam, OIRSI, 1996, pp. 196 Rs 70.00; (Abroad U. S. \$5.00) ISBN 81-86063-15-3.

In the understanding of Christian heritage there had been evolution and evaluations. There are many, and even today, who believe that there is only one christian theology, and that is the Latin theology. Still some others consider and evaluate Christianity in Greek and Latin terms, a bi-polar understanding of the christian tradition. The idea that the early christian tradition was limited to its Greek and Latin expressions is still widespread. This position weakens our understanding of the roots of the christian heritage and the very notion of theology and spirituality. Before christianity has become Greek and Latin, it had an original Aramaic (Syriac) expression. We have to still rediscover that unknown phase of Christianity. The cradle of Christianity was neither the Greek nor the Latin world but the Aramaic one. This Christianity found its best expression in the Syriac churches of the Persian world. This theological tradition that has developed in the churches outside the Greco-Roman world has already become an object of study among the scholarly circles. It is in this context that I see the theological and historical importance of this work. From the traditional bi-polar (Greek-Latin) appreciation of the Church, the author moves to the triangular (Aramaic, Greek, Latin) understanding of Christianity. Prof. Koodapuzha in his studies and researches always insists on the history and theology of the churches of the Persian empire. As the uneuropianized and unhellenized christianity, Asian christian tradition has a central role to play in over all christian make up.

The Book *Oriental Churches an Introduction* is an excellent path to enter into the theological world of the East both of the Syriac and Greek traditions. The book, though named as an Introduction, is actually an authentic and profound historico-theological exposition. It consists of four detailed chapters besides an introduction and a conclusion. Professor Koodapuzha's theologically disciplined critical mind brings out a systematic exposition of the eastern ecclesiality.

In the first chapter the author investigates the nature of the Church and its evolution in the Greco-Roman world. Then special attention is given to the Church of the Thomas Christians of India. Here the characteristic traits of the St Thomas Christians' ecclesiology is highlighted with due emphasis on palliyogam, Archdeacon of All India, Metropolitan of All India etc. Chapter two is a theological investigation into the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches. It is a theological

commentary on the major themes of the Decree. Here he deals with various topics, like the venerable oriental heritage, {unity and diversity within the catholic churches equality of the Churches, pastoral care and formation proper to each church, etc. Third chapter is a general survey of the Eastern Churches. This survey has been done very scientifically according to the liturgical families. This chapter includes a mosaic of theological informations regarding the various Eastern Churches. Chapter Four is a theological reflection on communion ecclesiology taking into consideration the particular situation of India and the renewed ecclesiology of communion of Vat II.

This book is a historical and theological attempt to present the Oriental ecclesiastical world to the attention of the readers. As an accomplished orientalist and as a well known theologian of the Church, Prof. Koodapuzha made a genuine attempt to get into the very ethos of the Christian East. An attempt at understanding the Eastern christian churches, eastern fathers, eastern monasticism, eastern spiritual writers, eastern liturgies, eastern martyrs and saints etc., has almost become a theological 'pleasure' among the skilful theologians. Because of the theological slogan 'going back to the sources', even among the western theologians there is a concerted effort to get back to the oriental sources and to establish the very christian origin and the uniqueness of the famous christian centres.

The book is written in very good english with the maximum scientific care. There is logical sequence and methodological consistency between the different parts of the work. This book is ornated with a very long index and a selected bibliography. The author has succeeded in entering into the deepest realms of oriental streams of thought and thus in establishing the theological identity of the christian East. This work stresses that the christian East is not something to be tolerated, but something to be received and experienced for the better understanding of the catholicity of the Church. This will enable us to move closer to the common roots of christianity. The ecumenical interest and involvement of the author enabled him to present the Christian East in its full theological context. The author's vast scholarship in ecclesiastical history and oriental theology makes this work unique in every respect. Oriental Churches An Introduction is an original theological contribution whose author deserves our appreciation.

Joseph Kallarangatt

News

1. The new Archbishops and Bishops have taken possession of their respective sees in the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches in India.

The newly appointed Archbishops and Bishops of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches in India have taken possession of their respective sees in January and February 1997.

Mar Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R was consecrated Archbishop by His Holiness Pope John Paul II on 6th January 1997 at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican. The new Archbishop took charge as the Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam and of the major Archiepiscopal Church of Ernakulam - Angamaly on 18th January in a solemn installation ceremony. It was presided over by His Grace Cyril Mar Baselios, the Archbishop of Trivandrum Malankara Archdiocese, and attended by several Archbishops and bishops of various Churches and also by Mons. Brogi and Fr. Milhall from the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

On 26th January 1997 Mar Mani Giles CMI was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Mananthavady and took charge of the diocese on the same day. Mar Varkey Vithayathil was the main celebrant. Mar George Alencherry was consecrated by His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil on 2nd February as the first bishop of the newly erected diocese of Thucklay in the state of Tamilnadu.

The new bishop was installed on the same day by His Grace Mar Varkey Vithayathil. Mar Thomas Elavanal MCBS was consecrated and installed Bishop of Kalyan diocese on 8th Feb. 1997 by His Grace Mar Varkey Vithayathil. The following Hierarches were transferred:-Mar Jacob Manantheodath from Ernakulam to Palakad on 1st Feb. 1997 and Mar Paul Chittilappilly from Kalyan to Thamarassery on 13th Feb. 1997. Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhy who was promoted as Archbishop of Thrissur took charge on 15th Feb. 1997. His Eminence Mar Antony Padiyara and His Grace Mar Joseph Kundukulam retired.

Mar Geevarghese Ottathengil was consecrated bishop of Sulthan Bethery of the Syro-Malankara Church on 5th Feb. 1997. He is named Geevarghese Mar Divannasios. His Excellency Lawrence Mar Apraem the auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum is appointed the first bishop of the newly erected diocese of Marthandam of the Syro-Malankara Church.

2. Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil felicitated

His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry and the President of the CBCI was felicitated on 13th Feb. 1997 in the S.B. College Auditorium Changanacherry, Kerala. The occasion was the Concelebrated Holy Qurbana and the public meeting to conclude the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Episcopal consecration of His Grace Mar Powathil. The Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his felicitation message congratulated His Grace for the wonderful services he is rendering to the Archdiocese and to the Church in India and expressed his joy and gratitude for his efficient spiritual leadership.

3. An Oriental Monastery for Men in the Syro-Malabar Church

The new building of the Mar Thoma Sreeha Ashram (Monastery) at Nallathanny was blessed by H.E. Mar Mathew Vattakuzhy, bishop of Kanjirapally, on the feast of Denha, January 6, 1997. The endeavour to give shape to a monasticism according to the authentic eastern and Syro - Malabar ecclesial traditions began long ago. Only now the dream to have a building of its own is realised. The monastery is intended to provide facilities for prayer, study and contemplation also to others who are not permanent members of the monastery. It is a modest beginning of a great movement which is highly desirable in the Syro-Malabar Church. The Vatican Council II and the Popes have repeatedly emphasized the importance of monasticism for the spiritual renewal of the Church. This monastic movement is led by Prof. Dr. Xavier Koodapuzha of Paurastya Vidyapitham, Kottayam 686 010, Kerala, India. The monastery is situated at Nallathanny in a calm, cool and serene atmosphere of the High Ranges about 3000 feet above the sea level overlooking the Arabian Sea. Information about the monastery can be obtained on request from Mar Thoma Sreeha Ashram, Nallathanny, Murinjapuzha P. O., Idukki Dt, Kerala, India, Pin Code: 685 532.

4. MCBS Congregation re-organised into Provinces

Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament has been re-organised into two Provinces. The official announcement was made on Dec. 2, 1996 by the Superior General and the new bishop Mar Thomas Elavanal MCBS. The Southern Province is called *Emmaus*, and the Northern Province is called *Sion*.

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- The liturgical families and their regional grouping - The latest statistical data of all the Oriental Churches - A commentary of the Decree on the Oriental Churches of Vatican Council II. Eastern and Ecumenical Reflections. This book is the fruit of many years of research and ecumenical expertise of the author.